

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS
AND PUBLIC SAFETY

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February 24, 2004

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
United States Senate
311 Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Byrd:

The Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) program is the single all hazards emergency preparedness grant program in support of capacity building at the state and local level. EMPG funds support the state and local foundation upon which our nation's emergency response system is built. The program supports state and local initiatives for planning, training, exercise, public education, command and control, as well as funding salaries for emergency operations personnel. The President's FY05 Budget Request to Congress proposes several changes to the EMPG program that will have a devastating impact on emergency preparedness at the state and local level. The President's proposal includes a 25 percent cap on the use of funds through EMPG to support personnel; that EMPG funding be reduced by \$9 million; and that the program's all hazards emphasis on emergency preparedness be shifted towards terrorism.

The President's proposal for a 25 percent cap on the use of EMPG for personnel costs will devastate state and local emergency management programs, and consequently the nation's emergency response system. The Office of Emergency Services staff cost charged to EMPG is presently \$728,798. If Congress retains the 25 percent cap on personnel costs, we would only be able to use \$182,199 for salaries, a \$546,599 shortfall. Of the 28 employees currently having 50 percent of their salary being paid for by EMPG, we would only be able to retain 10 personnel. Just as critical, counties would lose 75 percent of their nearly \$800,000 in EMPG for costs associated for reimbursement for county OES director and staff salaries. Of the 51 employees at the county level having 50 percent of their salary being paid for by EMPG, we would only be able to pay 13 personnel.

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The President's budget request also recommends a reduction of \$9 million in EMPG funding nationwide. A 2003 NEMA survey revealed a \$245 million shortfall in the EMPG program. The EMPG Program was created by Congress to be a 50/50 federal and state match program; however, it is states that are contributing more than their share. The current fiscal crisis that most states, including West Virginia, continue to experience makes it impossible for them to increase their cost share, particularly when they are already overmatching the EMPG program. Reductions in funding and limits on the use of funds for personnel effectively mean that the federal government will be forced to respond to disasters more frequently and at a higher cost, than if strong state and local emergency management programs remained in place. This is not a budget savings to the federal government and is not in the best interest of the state or nation.

The President's budget request suggests that terrorism should be emphasized in the EMPG program, thereby suggesting that preparedness efforts for hazardous materials releases, winter storms, floods, tornadoes, wildfires, and other natural hazards should be de-emphasized. You may recall that based on recently published FEMA data, West Virginia lead the nation in Presidential Disaster Declarations, with a total of four during FY03. None of these declarations were a result of acts of terrorism. During the same period, county emergency management personnel responded to nearly 150 spills and accidental releases of toxic chemicals. West Virginia and the other states must balance our preparedness efforts to appropriately integrate terrorism, but not to the detriment or exclusion of the existing national emergency response system that supports day-to-day public safety needs. On a daily basis, our state and county Office of Emergency Services staffs are the same personnel that would respond to acts of terrorism. EMPG ensures that the terrorism specific tasks for emergency management are handled professionally, as well as the manmade and natural disasters that occur almost daily.

The Department of Homeland Security was intended by Congress to be an agency with an all hazards focus, yet the President's budget request and most of the national strategies, plans and guidance documents issued by the department are focused on terrorism without regard for maintaining our existing emergency management system. A balance must be established between the need for day-to-day public safety programs and building homeland security systems, which should be mutually supportive. I recommend the following regarding the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program:

- (1) The proposal in the President's FY05 budget request for a 25 percent cap on the use of EMPG funds for personnel should be dropped.
- (2) In order to address the current \$245 million EMPG funding shortfall, EMPG should be funded at a minimum of \$430 million in FY05 (retain the \$185 million appropriation from FY04 plus \$245 million to address current shortfall).

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- (3) The EMPG program must retain its focus on all hazards emergency preparedness in order to appropriately balance capacity building for natural and manmade disasters, and terrorism.

Your continued support for maintaining a strong and balanced emergency management response system at the state and local levels is deeply appreciated.

Sincerely,


Stephen S. Kappa
Director